

CHEPHÎRAH OF BENJAMIN.

By E. W. G. MASTERMAN, M.A., F.S.A.

(The following interesting description of a little-known Benjaminite locality, by our valued correspondent Mr. Masterman, was originally contributed to *Home Words*, a Jerusalem monthly publication.—ED.)

“CHEPHÎRAH is first mentioned in Joshua ix, 17, as one of the four cities of the Gibeonites; the others were Gibeon (*el Jib* behind *Nebi Samuël*), Beeroth (generally identified as the present *Birch* on the road to *Nablûs*), and Kirjath-Jearim (possibly *Kuriet en 'enab* more commonly called *Abu Ghosh*). It is clear that Chephîrah was an important place. It is mentioned again in Josh. xviii, 26, as one of the cities of Benjamin, in association with Mizpêh (supposed to be *Nebi Samuël*) and Mozah (which has been identified by Buhl with *Kulônêh*). The name occurs again in Ezra ii, 25, and Neh. vii, 29, and in the form Caphira in 1 Esdras v, 19; each of these passages refers to the townships represented among the returning Israelites.

“In 1852, the learned Prof. Edward Robinson (*Researches*, Vol. III, p. 146) writes: ‘At Yalo, we were told of a ruin in the mountains on the east, said not to be far off, called *Kefîr*. It was, however, now too late for us to visit it from Yalo, nor were we able afterwards to make an excursion to it from Jerusalem. But in the name *Kefîr* it is impossible not to recognise the ancient Caphirah, a city of the Gibeonites . . . From that day to this it has remained unknown.’

“The merit of discovering the site of Ancient Caphirah thus belongs to Robinson, but, as a matter of fact, the site in question is not *Kefîr* but, which is much more like the old name, *Kefîreh*. The Palestine Exploration Fund survey (*Memoirs*, Vol. III, p. 103) gives the name correctly, but their eight lines of description give but little idea of the interesting position of this ancient site.

“As on Sept. 7th I, quite by chance, found myself there and, as I have found no description of the place, beyond the eight lines mentioned above, I venture here to describe briefly my visit.

“It was in the course of a visit to *Kubaibeh* that my sight was arrested by the appearance of a lofty hill to the west which, unlike its neighbours, was covered with brush-wood and had a flattened top, clearly artificial. It was manifestly a *tell* covering an ancient site. At the suggestion of Canon Marriott we made a walk there. We descended the valley to the west of the Franciscan Convent, following the line of an ancient road. About half-way, we reached an ancient spring excavated, like most of them in the district, a long way into the hill-side. Here we left the road and kept along the terraced hill-side gradually ascending among fine old olives. At length, just an hour after starting, we reached our destination. Below the artificial hill-top, on the north-east, is a beautiful grove of trees, and among them we found a group of boys who informed us that the place was known as *Jebal Kefireh*. The whole level top of the hill is surrounded by a great quadrilateral wall of massive stones, some of which are drafted. The top wall is 10 to 15 feet high outside, though on the level of the earth inside, and several high terraces lie immediately below. The whole area is thick with fragments of ancient (Roman) pottery, including many jar-handles, none, so far as I saw, inscribed. The most striking thing about *Jebal Kefireh* is the surroundings. The mountain mass, of which the artificial hill is the western point and the summit, is isolated by two wadys, the northern one arising at *Kubaibeh*, and the southern, a very deep and rocky valley, commencing to the west of the little village of *Katanneh*, which lies at its bottom. The two join immediately to the west of *Kefireh* and run west to *Yalo* (Ajlun). Above these valleys, the site of Chephirah towers: it is the place for a fortress post, as the *Wady el Katneh* must ever have been a vulnerable spot. From the lofty summit we see a great stretch of the Plain of Sharon with Jaffa on the north-west. At the end of the valley lies *Yalo*, and we can catch a glimpse of the Jerusalem-Jaffa road as it traverses the *Wady el Khalil*. Behind it, the hill of Gezer stands out prominently. The hill, isolated on the north, west, and south, is, to the east, somewhat separated from the mountain ridge to which it belongs, by a shallow valley. The site is the ideal one for safety in ancient days. The spring which now supplies the valley of *Katanneh*, may have supplied Chephirah, but against times of siege, there were reserve supplies in cisterns, the ruins of which can be seen to-day.”